



CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION FOR HUMAN SERVICES

2015 POLICY AGENDA

SHORT TERM

TAXES:

- **Fully reinstate the state Earned Income Tax Credit:** Connecticut's EITC was cut from 30% of the federal credit to 25% in 2013. It was increased to 27.5% in the 2014 session, and is scheduled to be fully restored to previous levels in 2015. We will advocate in favor of fully restoring the state EITC to 30%.
 - Lead organization: CAHS.
- **Creating a Child Tax Credit / state child tax deduction:** Connecticut is one of the few states with an income tax that does not include any breaks for parents and children. With child poverty numbers stubbornly high, a fully reimbursable child tax credit can provide much needed help to the children of Connecticut's working poor families. A child tax deduction is more of a middle-class benefit.
 - Lead organization: CT Voices for Children.

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION:

- **Office of Early Childhood: Monitor the system building and streamlining of the OEC, and adopt policies that will promote an early childhood system, including:**
 - Establish equity across the ECE system including rates, requirements, parent fees, and data collection.
 - Develop and administer a preschool unmet needs survey.
 - Build stronger connections between the OEC and Early Childhood Councils and ensure continued implementation of Community Plans for Early Childhood.
 - Lead Organization: Graustein Statewide Partners, including CAHS.
- **Care for Kids:** Increase the rates paid to centers to match the 3% increases scheduled for family child care providers. Align state and federal redetermination requirements. To avoid benefit cliffs, open PG 6 to allow continued eligibility for families with incomes that increase over 50% of SMI up to 75% of SMI.
- **School Readiness:** Remove residency requirements for ECE slots to allow programs with vacant slots to fill them with children from adjoining communities.
- **Early Care Workforce:** Implement policies and guidelines that promote wages commensurate with the educational credentials required of early care providers and develop a rate structure to support guidelines.
- **Infant/toddler care:** Increase accessibility of infant/toddler care by raising reimbursement rates at State-Funded Child Development Centers. Allow State Head Start funds to be used for Early Head Start.
 - Lead organization for prior four items: Early Childhood Alliance.
- **Early Childhood Mental Health:** Expansion of screening and expansion of services within a two generation model.

ECONOMIC SECURITY:

- **Two-generation strategies:** Implement the recommendations of the Two-Generation Policy Working Group, including: fund a two generational competitive grant process to foster community collaborations, lay the groundwork for an aligned contributions/collective impact framework, and incentivize adult education to develop a cross-generation strategy. Update TANF regulations to support parents in need of education or training necessary for economically supportive employment (See Economic Security Section).
 - Lead organizations: Commission on Children and CAHS.
 - H.B. 5823
- **Reform Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) to Support Self-Sufficiency:**
 - **Asset Limits**—Seven states have eliminated TANF asset limits, simplifying administrative procedures for the state and reducing costs. It is important that Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) participants be able to accumulate resources as they move into the workforce.
 - **Education and training**—Stop the clock on the 21 month time limit when a JFES participant is actively pursuing a high school credential (GED or other) or a associates degree or participating in an apprenticeship program. Make access to GED and other high school credentialing programs an entitlement for JFES participants who lack this credential.
 - **Income cliffs**—Instead of a complete loss of benefits at the end of 21 months or an extension period, lessen the cliff effect, perhaps by continuing benefits for a year after a parent has earned income that made the family ineligible for continued cash assistance.
 - **Family Cap**—Eliminate both parts of family cap penalty: reduction of benefits for additional children *and* elimination of exemption from work requirement and time limits for parents while child is under the age of 1.
- **Eliminate asset limits on LIHEAP (energy assistance) and Care 4 Kids:** Asset limits affect very few households, and deter development of assets, a key aspect of financial security that can help families permanently move off of public assistance. Eliminating asset limits will ease the administrative burden on DSS, and help families save money and build assets to get out of poverty.
 - Lead organization: CABHN and CAHS
- **Limit the impact of benefit cliffs:** When incomes rise, benefits can end abruptly, resulting in a huge marginal tax rate, creating disincentives to earn more, and weakening the safety net. Care 4 Kids.
 - Lead organizations: TBD – CAHS Family Economic Success Coalition, CT Voices, CABHN, others.
- **Financial education:** Develop financial education programs in higher education and K12. Evaluate needs and mandates, and create pilot programs. One possible strategy could be requiring “plain vanilla,” no frills options for financial products.
 - Lead organization: CAHS, possibly with CT Asset Building Collaborative.



ACCESS TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION:

- **Access to higher education: remedial education reform.** The FESC will work to guarantee that all students have the opportunity to access and complete post secondary education, including certificate programs, working with stakeholders and legislators to improve the remedial education system in Connecticut, and obtain additional funding to ensure this objective is met.
 - Lead organization: CAHS
- **Access to higher education: CHET accounts.** The Connecticut Higher Education Trust (CHET) Baby Scholars program was introduced in 2014 in Connecticut, but it is opt-in and fairly limited. We will advocate for an expansion and simplified enrollment, and possibly seek allowing an income tax refund allocation to CHET.
 - Lead organization: CAHS, with CT Asset Building Collaborative.
- **College affordability:** Evaluate ways to make college more affordable for low-income workers and students, reviewing the report of the College Affordability Task Force and the Borrower Bill of Rights. Promote two-year free community college and other options.
 - Lead organization: Working Families Party and Higher Ed Not Debt Coalition.



OTHER AGENDA ITEMS, WORKING WITH ALLIES:

JOBS:

- **Jobs agenda:** work with the Campaign for Working Connecticut and other advocates. CWCT priorities include:
 - Implementing regional industry partnerships through Workforce Investment Boards, with oversight from the CT Employment and Training Commission.
 - Expanding resources for incumbent worker technical/occupational training.
 - Earmarking state financial aid to support non-degree technical training and industry credentials.
 - Investing additional funds in innovative skills and college transition programs.
 - Maintaining adequate resources for workers' child care and transportation needs.
- **Pursue apprenticeship funding opportunities at DOT.**
- **Tipped workers minimum wage:** the 2014 minimum wage increase did not increase minimum wages for tipped workers. We will support an increase. WFP is the lead.
- **Retirement Security Board - public option for pensions:** pending the report from the board, we will support their findings and push for a bill. One option could be an automatic retirement savings program, like that recently passed in Illinois.

HOUSING:

- **Affordable housing:** work with the Partnership for Strong Communities, CT Coalition to End Homelessness, CT Housing Coalition and other advocates to pursue.
 - Multifamily housing: additional bond financing, capital incentives for HOMEConnecticut, incentives for multi-bedroom affordable units.
 - More density housing near transit stations
 - Affordable rental housing incentives: flexible rental subsidies, targeted subsidies.
 - Rapid re-housing: rapid rehousing capital fund of \$5 million.

AREAS WE WILL BE MONITORING:

- **Paid family and medical leave:** following the release of the report from the task force, we will track the bill coming out from their discussion, following the lead of the FMLI Coalition.
 - Lead organization: CWEALF
- **Federal funding for early care and education:** the state is working to adapt Care 4 Kids to prepare for the new round of grant funding. Monitor their work and changes introduced to the program.
 - Lead organization: CECA